

The Travels of Joseph II in Hungary, Transylvania, Slavonia and the Banat of Temesvar,¹ 1768–1773

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Joseph II is often considered to be a much travelled emperor. While his travels abroad under the pseudonym of Count Falkenstein have been widely studied, his tours within his own realms are much less researched. Rather than pursuing Romantic adventures, his principal aim was to learn about the political, military and social conditions of his realm and its inhabitants. The purpose of this contribution is to analyse the travels Joseph II undertook in Hungary, Transylvania, Slavonia and the Banat between 1768 and 1773. With the help of examples, the article explores how the various experiences Joseph II had during his visits influenced his ideas, his reform policy and ultimately his practice of rule.

Introduction

Joseph II is widely known as the travelling emperor. Already in his lifetime, several contemporary publications concentrated on the tours of this ‘eccentric’ Emperor.² This theme was highlighted subsequently by historians. Amongst these journeys, the ones that attracted particular attention were the trips undertaken abroad ‘incognito’ under the pseudonym of Count Falkenstein.³ However, arguably it was not these trips but the Emperor’s travels within his own realms that are of key importance. There is a clear link between Joseph II’s personal experiences of domestic

¹ The Banat of Temesvar was an area on the north bank of the River Danube. Nowadays its territory is divided between Romania, Serbia and Hungary. Hereafter it will be referred to as the Banat.

² Anonymous 1777; Coudray 1777a; Coudray 1777b; Duval-Pyrau 1777; Geisler 1777; Mayer 1778; Lemaire 1781; Geisler 1781.

³ Mitrofanov 1910; Beales 1987 and Beales 2009; Béranger 2007.

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travel and the decrees he later issued as sole ruler. Despite their formative nature, these tours have so far attracted little scholarly attention.⁴

Joseph II famously attempted to form a unified state from the various Habsburg lands. The state he envisaged was standardized, homogenized and based on a truly meritocratic principle. These aims, and the language in which it was couched, namely, the promotion of the greater public good, religious toleration and the service of the state led the Emperor to be classified as a representative of ‘enlightened absolutism’. It is beyond the scope of this paper to contribute to the debate on ‘enlightened absolutism’ or even to engage with the contested issue of what ‘enlightened’ means in this context. However, it is clear that the inception of the policies of introducing uniformity and stamping out exemptions and immunities that earned Joseph II this epithet is to be found in his early domestic travels. This paper attempts to prove this by examining three particular journeys of the Emperor. One of the destinations, the Banat (a region marked out by the rivers Danube, Maros and Tisza) is especially instructive in this regard as it served as a testing ground for several experimental reforms conducted directly from Vienna. First, the theory behind the Emperor’s travels is addressed and then compared with the actual practice. Then the paper focuses on the duties of the co-regent and how Joseph II influenced Maria Theresa’s decrees, if at all, and finally on how the Emperor’s priorities evolved with special regard to religious tolerance, linguistic uniformity and the question of humanitarianism.

The travels in question are the three journeys that the co-regent undertook in the eastern part of the Habsburg Monarchy: the Banat (17 April to 9 June 1768), Hungary (23 April to 19 June 1770), the Banat again, together with Transylvania and Galicia (6 May to 13 September 1773). These travels had the same aim as the Emperor’s earlier visits to Bohemia and Moravia (6 to 14 October 1764,⁵ and 1 October to 17 November 1771⁶) and the Austrian duchies (18 August to 7 November 1779), namely, to get acquainted with the various lands that constituted the Habsburg Monarchy. This emphasis on personal experience was a new element in Habsburg rule. The three journeys under consideration provided the Emperor with his first impressions of these vital regions. These

4 For a detailed bibliographical survey of contemporary scholarship on the subject see Kulcsár 2004b. In this paper, it is impossible to provide a comprehensive overview of the various types of travels. This is partly due to the fact that the topic has recently attracted renewed scholarly attention. Let it suffice here to name the major works that contain a discussion of the most recent trends in this field of research together with the relevant secondary literature: Adams 1983; Brenner 1990; Maurer 1999; Bauerkämper, A., H.E. Bödeker & B. Struck 2004.

5 Wandruszka 1965, Vol. 1. 107. The diaries of Archduke Leopold: Bleckwenn et al. 1984.

6 Weinzierl 1954 and see Brambilla 1790, 30–32.

territories included border areas that had been subject to various experimental reforms from the mid-1760s onward. Between 1768 and 1773, Joseph II sought to visit these regions repeatedly in order to observe any changes that may have resulted from his reforms. These travels provided him with a chance to inspect and supervise, and helped crystalize the Emperor's ideas about how to rule in the future.

In this paper, I seek to contrast and compare Joseph II's notes in his travel diaries, that is, his personal opinions with the royal decrees that were issued in the Kingdom of Hungary, in Transylvania and in the Banat. The primary focus here is on the fields over which Joseph II exercised control during his co-regency, namely, military affairs: the effective protection of the Monarchy's borders, matters relating to fortifications and the billeting of regiments. When on tour, however, Joseph II consciously examined the effects of Maria Theresa's decrees on the individual regions, with special regard to everything that had to do with the economy. In general, the ideas that found expression in the Emperor's iconic decrees such as the Edict of Toleration, his Language Decree and decrees concerning a uniform and rational state administration, not to mention his attempts to protect ordinary subjects are already present in one form or another in these travel diaries. Hence, these up to now relatively little known sources are crucial in understanding the inception of Joseph II's future policies.

The travel diaries of these visits, although subjective, are a rich source material for the territory in question in the late 18th century. Joseph II kept these travel diaries during his journeys, and wrote into them daily. His notes were not just written for him but partly for the benefit and information of Maria Theresa. This is why a finalized version of them was always presented to Maria Theresa after the individual tours. After the death of Maria Theresa, Joseph II tellingly stopped the practice of keeping a travel journal.⁷ Joseph II did tour Hungary as sole ruler (25 April to 11 July 1783, 16 June to 14 October 1786) but he did not keep a travel diary for himself, hence these travels are not included here. His Bohemian and Moravian trips, as well as his visits to the other hereditary provinces are also omitted. These tours have not been sufficiently explored by historians and only a few travel diaries have been published.⁸

⁷ Kulcsár 2004b, 112, 115.

⁸ Engl & Wührer 1979.

In the early stages of his travels, from 1765 onward, the co-regent not only handed over a copy of his travel diaries to Maria Theresa but also his reports as well. These were usually thematically organized: first, the current situation was described and then reform proposals were put forward. By this stage, Joseph II was able to compare and contrast reality with his own ideas and principles, and could propose changes on the basis of actual cases. However, it was not unknown for the Emperor to ignore specific local circumstances if it suited his argumentation.

These two types of sources (travel diaries and reports) give us an insight into the ideas of this emblematic figure of ‘enlightened absolutism’ at the turn of the 1760s and 1770s. It is informative to examine what new ideas were already incorporated into these sources. With the help of a few specific examples, it is also possible to show what experiences might have influenced Joseph II’s reform agenda. Here it is impossible to provide a comprehensive treatment of the subject.

The Emperor’s Journeys in Theory and Practice

The following data speak clearly of the importance of travel in Joseph II’s life: between 12 September 1765 and 20 February 1790 (during his time as co- and sole ruler) he spent 2,683 days out of the total of 8,928 days away from Vienna. This equals more than seven whole years.⁹ During this time, he travelled across Europe as well as within his own realms or was on military expeditions commanding his army. In other words, he spent every third day of his reign in one of his lands, on the Italian Peninsula, in France or Russia.¹⁰ The usual reasons given for this peripateticism are: his heartache caused by the loss of his beloved first wife, Isabella of Parma, who died on 27 November 1763; his way of avoiding from tedious court ceremonies and etiquette; his uneasy relationship with his mother and co-regent, Maria Theresa. Besides visiting his siblings abroad, his foreign travels gave him a chance to get to know the workings of other states and collect first-hand knowledge about governmental practices, economic theories and methods. Of all his journeys, the impact his travels in France had on Joseph II is the best explored.¹¹ Nonetheless, in addition to his foreign tours Joseph systematically travelled across his own lands from an early age. The aim of the latter visits was to acquaint himself with his realms. His image of the ideal

⁹ May 1985, 4, for corrected data see Kulcsár 2004a, 40–41.

¹⁰ Kulcsár 2004b, 109–110, with further references, mostly in German.

¹¹ Wagner 1965.

monarch, induced by his education, was of a ruler who gets to know his own dominions intimately through personal visits.

This ideal was shared by some contemporary monarchs who conducted regular inspection tours in their countries. Johann Josef Khevenhüller-Metsch, the Imperial Majordomo of Maria Theresa noted in his diary that the example of the Prussian King, Frederick II inspired Joseph II, particularly when it came to military reviews (*Revueisen, Inspektionsreisen*). Frederick II visited his regiments annually and took part in military exercises.¹² Another ruler famous for travelling was Catherine II, who toured Russia extensively with the express purpose of getting to know it.¹³

Joseph II viewed ruling as a ‘profession’, and the ideas of service and improvement were central to his thinking. One of the key means he applied to reach these ends was to travel widely and collect information on the local effects of centrally administered government policy. Already at the end of 1765, he produced a political memorandum (*Denkschrift*) about the Habsburg Monarchy.¹⁴ In the 17 points contained in this writing, the young and ambitious Emperor provided a detailed and thorough analysis of his realms but also explored his own role in their government. In the penultimate Point 16, he emphasized the importance of journeys for a monarch.¹⁵ By this, however, he did not mean the traditional representative imperial visits. Owing to the central importance of this source it is quoted at some length:

it is vitally important to observe what is going on politically, in civilian life and in the military sphere. I am not so naive as to believe that my personal presence and inspection will solve every problem. However, the ones that are solved are worth the trouble. We are presented with a favourable though veiled picture; nonetheless, if we keep returning differences will emerge: we hear the complaints, get to know our subjects, assess their potential use, judge the conduct of others, observe the physical attributes of the countryside and the settlements and finally form our own opinion of the capabilities and diligence of our ministers [administrators].¹⁶

¹² Khevenhüller & Schlitter 1917, 187; Hinrichs 1940, 105; Pfeiffer 1965, 27 29–70.

¹³ Bessarabova 2008; Ibneeva 2006; Ibneeva 2008.

¹⁴ Arneth 1868, 335–361. Recently by Beales 1987, 164–169.

¹⁵ Arneth 1868, 359.

¹⁶ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchive, Hausarchiv, Hofreisen Kt. 1. Nr. 4. fol. 3r–v.

Apart from a theoretical exploration of the subject, the Emperor also drew up a programme of travel. He summarized his own approach and provided a timetable for his future visits:

It is obvious to me why it is useful to travel and see our own lands and those of our neighbours, if we apply true means, carefully remove all obstacles and if the traveller possesses the mental and physical ability to forgo every comfort and pleasure and seek solely what is useful and necessary.¹⁷

The co-regent produced a gruelling plan. He was to tour Bohemia and Moravia in 1766, and the southern frontier (the Banat and Slavonia) in 1768. Other parts of his realms were to be visited in the course of four lengthy tours. These were all considered ‘essentiellement necessaire’, and pencilled in yearly for the period of 1769–1772. Joseph II explained the intensity of his travel plan by the peace that prevailed in Europe at the time, his good health and his belief that his presence in Vienna was unnecessary. He proposed to visit the Austrian Netherlands in a journey that was also to include a two-week stay in the Netherlands. The second tour hoped to take in Inner Austria and the Italian Peninsula, while the aim of the third trip was to see Croatia and the Littoral. The fourth journey was to Transylvania and parts of Hungary.¹⁸ Joseph II laid special importance on surveying the border regions of his realms. His itinerary was so detailed that it included specific roads. This shows how methodically Joseph II planned to acquaint himself with his provinces.

Joseph II's Travels within the Habsburg Monarchy

It is important to emphasize that Joseph II's habit of travelling as Count Falkenstein only applied to trips abroad. Within the Habsburg Monarchy, he toured as himself. His so-called ‘inspection tours’ (the name itself was borrowed from Frederick II), however, are hardly known and have not been properly studied by historians.¹⁹ These travels were nothing like the stunning ceremonial journeys undertaken by some of his contemporary rulers whose aim was to impress. These ceremonial, courtly visits were ‘official’ and for the most politically motivated. The Habsburg court itself was sometimes away from Vienna. In these cases the ruler travelled with a vast entourage. The trips followed a given ceremonial blue-print and cost enormous amounts of money.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ On his programme, see also Beales 1987, 251–255.

¹⁹ Mostly in unpublished dissertations: Neidenbach 1967, Rumpel 1946. For published works, see May 1985 and Kulcsár 2004a.

The occasions for such visits were royal and imperial coronations, the ceremonial opening or closing of diets, and royal weddings. The Imperial Majordomo's Office (*Obersthofmeisteramt*) was responsible for the organization of these ceremonial trips. It coordinated the work of other Viennese central court authorities. The Office of the Master of the Horse (*Oberstallmeister*) delivered the required number of carriages and horses, while the Office of the Senior Court Marshall (*Obersthofmarschall*) arranged the accommodation. The Imperial War Council secured the routes, provided guards and gun salutes.

Joseph II's tours within his lands could not have been more different from the practice described above. The Emperor arranged his travels in such a way that they would cause as little disruption in the territories he visited as possible. Joseph II used the term 'incognito' (*'in dem vollkommensten Incognito'*) to indicate this special way of organizing and undertaking his journeys at home. It was not meant to conceal his real identity. His aim was to avoid the cumbersome ceremonial occasions that were part and parcel of representative visits. He disliked ceremony and thought it would unnecessarily burden the inhabitants of the lands concerned. Moreover, travelling 'incognito' in this understanding was probably to his liking: "Only the greats possess the ability to change their existence and circumstances and if they so wish become little or common individuals while no matter what the others do they always remain commoners."²⁰

This is why he opted for a simple carriage and took only a small entourage. Joseph II strictly forbade the representatives of the Estates and local authorities to greet him with speeches and gun salutes or express their respect in any other ways. He ordered his accommodation to be in inns, at the local priest's house or in buildings owned by the Royal or Imperial Chamber. He also decreed that no special road or bridge repairs should be carried out on the occasion of his visit. The Emperor specifically instructed the local authorities how many horses to supply and where to obtain them. He also specified how much would be paid for his accommodation and the food consumed. From 1768 on, he allowed his subjects to present signed petitions (*Memorialien*).²¹

From the 1770s on, the co-regent increasingly relied on the Imperial War Council in organizing his travels. For instance, when the route of a trip was to be decided, it was the job of a military

²⁰ Arneth 1868, 359.

²¹ Special orders of Joseph II: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Kriegsarchiv, Wiener Hofkriegsrat, Akten (in politicis) 1766 2 Januar Nr. 285; *ibid.* 1766 April 317–2; *ibid.* 1769–92–18; *ibid.* 1769–12–71; *ibid.* 1772–77–1; *ibid.* 1775–77–2 and *ibid.* 1783–49–6.

officer to test the planned route. It was horse regiments that supplied the necessary horses, particularly in the military frontier zone, an area bordering the Ottoman empire which was under direct military control. Normally, it was regimental commanders or colonels whose task it was to escort the Emperor. The military guarded Joseph II's baggage, his lodgings at night and also served as his personal guards. Nonetheless, it was the civilian authorities (counties, cities) of a given territory that provided coachmen and (between 54 and 74) horses to pull the Emperor's 9–13 carriages. It was also the latter's job to secure enough food for 30–50 people at the designated accommodation each evening.²²

The Duties of the Co-Regent and the Decrees of Maria Theresa

As co-regent, Joseph II's main area of concern was the military. As a natural consequence of this, the Emperor's primary aim was to survey the state of military regiments and fortifications within his realms. All three journeys under consideration concerned the defence of the Habsburg Monarchy's borders. In these cases, the Emperor focused on border defence. It was particularly so in the Banat (a territory he visited on all three trips), and Transylvania; both regions bordered on the Ottoman Empire. Amongst Joseph II's travel companions were expert military engineers such as General Ferdinand Philipp Harsch, Colonel Claude-Benoit de Querlonde and General Karl Clemens Pellegrini. With them, the co-regent visited and inspected the following fortifications that were in the process of being rebuilt or further fortified: Szeged, Arad [Oradea]²³, Temesvár [Timișoara], Pétervárad [Petrovaradin], Gyulafehérvár [Alba Iulia]; and in Slavonia: Eszék [Osijek], Bród [Slavonski Brod], Racsá [Stara Rača], Ógradiska [Stara Gradiška]. In Hungary and Transylvania, the Emperor paid a visit to the fortresses of Komárom [Komárno] and Győr but also took in such strategically insignificant but formerly important strongholds such as Munkács [Mukachevo], Huszt [Khust], Lipótvár [Leopoldov], Szamosújvár [Gherla] and Marosvásárhely [Târgu Mureș]. The Emperor penned or dictated detailed notes about these fortifications ranging from their quality down to the state of the moat. Joseph II judged the fortifications of Arad and Szeged totally inadequate, and found plenty to criticise in Temesvár, Pétervárad, Eszék, Bród and

²² Kulcsár 2004a, 79–164.

²³ A settlement's current name is given in square brackets if the settlement in question is not on the territory of present-day Hungary.

Ógradiska as well. He often selected high-ranking officers to travel with. Field-Marshal Count Franz Moritz Lacy (the President of the Imperial War Council) and General Count Friedrich Moritz Nostitz accompanied the Emperor on military exercises and parades, which gave them a chance to assess the state of individual regiments. Joseph II regularly called on cavalry and infantry regiments but in Arad and Pétervárad he also inspected artillery regiments and units. He often commanded his troops in person, and was a very critical observer of the officers and the recruits. He paid attention to the horses as well. The border region was of special interest in the Banat (where these years saw the inception of the idea of a purely military frontier zone) and Transylvania, where military frontier regiments were organized between 1762 and 1764. In both cases, the travellers came to the conclusion that the system of border defences needed improving. In 1768, Joseph II was exercised by this issue and made specific proposals concerning how the Habsburg Monarchy might better defend its borders against a potential Ottoman attack.

It is a well-known fact that in 1766, during his first inspection tour, Joseph II visited the battle fields of the Seven Years' War.²⁴ From his report on his travels in the Banat, it also transpires why he did so. He was no mere 'tourist', nor did he want to pay his respects to the achievements of former military grandees (particularly Eugene of Savoy). He was there to learn, specifically to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of former military practices, strategies and tactics. When the Emperor took in the battle fields of the Seven Years' War, he was in fact considering the chances of a Prussian (or even Austrian) attack. He had a similar motivation in 1768, when he looked at the major scenes of the war against the Ottomans at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries and the War of 1737–1739. The details concerning this aspect of his journey were scattered throughout his diaries but in his report he summarized them: he considered the quality of the roads, whether it was easy to move cannons on the terrain and how defensible a given territory was. In the case of the Banat, the co-regent worked out a specific military tactic and assigned various positions to individual regiments in the eventuality of a war against the Ottoman Empire. In case of an offensive, he believed it was of vital importance to take Old Orsova and the isle of Orsova since these Ottoman strongholds secured control of the Danube.²⁵ Another target was Belgrad, which

²⁴ May 1985, 70.

²⁵ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchive, Hausarchiv, Hofreisen Kt. 3. alter Fasc. 3. fol. 362r–370r. Joseph II's report on military affairs, also see his diary: Hofreisen Kt. 2. alter Fasc. 3. fol. 13r–v. Zsupanek [Jupanic], 30. April 1768 and Dubova, 1. May 1768.

had a key position in terms of the navigation of the Danube. An inspection that was carried out by boat showed that the strong current made it impossible to take Belgrad from the river side.²⁶ These personal observations were to be of benefit later. In 1788, when a war was indeed being waged against the Ottomans, Joseph II's earlier plans were influential. A surprise attack against Belgrad failed. The Habsburg troops were gathering near Pancova and Mehadia but they were spread over a long strip of territory and were moving too slowly for a surprise attack. Joseph II and his co-travellers had established in 1768 that the weakest part of the Habsburg frontier was at Mehadia, and it was precisely at that spot that the Habsburg forces were subject to a considerable Ottoman onslaught twenty years later.²⁷

Another focus of Joseph II's early travels was his concern to establish how efficient the civilian administration was. He was particularly interested in the implementation of decrees that had been issued in Vienna. The subject that especially stands out was the *Urbaria*, the central regulation of seigneurial rights over serfs, which began in 1766. Joseph II witnessed various phases of this long drawn-out process within Hungary, whilst in Transylvania he was confronted by the negative effects of the lack of such regulation. The Emperor was most inquisitive about the living conditions of recent settlers in the Banat, a territory which was still only sparsely populated. He insisted on professionalism in all fields of life, especially when it came to the economy. He was always seeking out the company of experts who could inform him about numerous aspects of the conditions of a given land. In his diaries, he devoted pride of place to industries that were promoted by the cameralists. These German and Austrian economists believed that a state's strength was in its wealth and this wealth could be maximized with the help of export subsidies and the promotion of domestic industries. Industries of key importance were, for example, silk production, forestry and mining. Both Maria Theresa and Joseph II vigorously promoted silk production and the plantation of mulberry trees, as well as the cultivation of industrial crops such as flax cotton and dyer's woad (*isatis tinctoria*). These were to provide raw materials for budding Austrian industries. Whether on horseback or travelling by carriage, the Emperor always made a special point of inspecting the woodlands and informed himself about the state of the lucrative lumber industry, a steady source of income for the Treasury. Even at the stage of preparation for the individual trips, state-run

²⁶ Ibid. fol. 33r. Zimony [Zemun], 24. May 1768.

²⁷ Beales 2009, 555–582.

mines were invariably included in the itinerary. Hence, Joseph II visited the iron mines in Zalatna [Zlatna], the salt mine in Sóvár [Solivar] in Upper Hungary, various salt mines in Transylvania like Parajd [Praid], Torda [Turda], Désakna [Ocna Dejului], Rónaszék [Coştiui] and precious metal mines in Szászka [Sasca Montană] and Szlatina [Slatina-Nera] in the Banat. He also showed an interest in the social and economic conditions of his subjects. Consequently, he went to see orphanages, workhouses, prisons and schools. At the latter, he paid attention to their educational achievements as well as the living conditions of the pupils and the state of the buildings.

The Evolving Priorities of Joseph II as Sole Ruler

Joseph II's method of government was characterised by centralisation, attempts at introducing uniformity, clear guiding principles and the stamping out of exemptions and immunities. The Emperor had already given expression to these aims during his travels in the various lands of the Habsburg Monarchy. As noted above, during his co-regency Joseph II visited the Banat three times. This region had a special status amongst Habsburg provinces. After 1718 (the year of its re-conquest from the Ottomans), this territory was ruled directly by the monarch who was also the only landowner there. The province was run directly from Vienna by the central imperial authorities. However, these authorities lacked experience and knowledge of the area. Both in 1768 and 1770, the Emperor displayed his dissatisfaction with this state of affairs. He was also unhappy with the local authorities that were busy undermining each other. Joseph II's visit of 1768 resulted in an inquiry that dragged on until 1774. The purpose was to find out why the Emperor's instructions concerning the lack of formalities during his tours had not been observed.²⁸ In order to improve the administration of the region, Joseph II proposed alternatives to Maria Theresa.²⁹ He suggested that state-owned land should be sold off, a suggestion he repeated in 1773. He also proposed the militarization of the whole province. The third option he offered was the least practical. It was merely to improve the existing arrangement. However, Maria Theresa opted for this third option: she intended to remedy the situation by a change of personnel and the reform of the local administration. As a result, the mostly Vienna-based Count Perlas, the president of

²⁸ Kulcsár 2004a, 315–329.

²⁹ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchiv, Hausarchiv, Hofreisen Kt. 2. alter Fasc. 3. fol. 324r–325v. Joseph II's report on religion.

the administration of the Banat was pensioned off.³⁰ His successor was Count Karl Ignaz Clary-Aldringen.³¹ With a few exceptions, most administrators were dismissed as a result of Joseph II's report. This tinkering, nevertheless, did not solve the underlying fundamental problems. The quality and efficiency of the administration did not improve. The new administrators again were busy discrediting each other.³² Joseph II witnessed this in person in 1773. Despite the reform plans coming from Vienna, the efficiency of the administration hinged on reliable and effective people on the ground. Count Clary permanently feuded with his underlings, who in turn complained about him to the State Council (*Staatsrat*).³³ This state of affairs was deemed unacceptable.³⁴ As a result, state-owned land was put up for sale, the Hungarian county system was introduced and the province was incorporated into the Kingdom of Hungary in 1778.³⁵

Joseph II was particularly struck by the various legal jurisdictions that co-existed in Transylvania. This might have driven him to try to abolish this colourful patchwork of legal entities and govern Transylvania as a single, uniformly governed province. He suggested that Transylvania (with the exception of the military frontier zone) should be united with the counties of the eastern part of Hungary as well as those of Maramaros and the Banat. He named Nagyvárad [Oradea] as the centre of this planned larger territorial unit. He also considered merging the Chanceries of Hungary and Transylvania (a plan that was indeed realized in 1782³⁶). The Emperor envisaged that this new territorial unit would exist in a personal union with the Kingdom of Hungary, hence practically have a similar relationship to Hungary as Croatia. He argued for this scheme by claiming that such an arrangement would provide uniform rights and obligations to the inhabitants who currently were made up of various denominations and ethnic groups enjoying

30 Don Francesco de Paula Ramon comte Vilana Perlas-Rialp (1704–1773), as president of the administration between 1753 and 1768. See Feneşan 1997, 84–85.

31 On Perlas's pension (30 August 1768): Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Kabinettsarchiv, Staatsrat, Protokoll 1768. Nr. 2064. The nomination of Clary: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (Budapest), Magyar Kincstári Levéltárak, Bánáti kamarai szervek, Landes-Administration in dem Banat Temesvár (E 303), II. Registerbook of 1769. fol. fol. 329r. (1769. IV. Nr. 319.), also see the Registerbook of the Council of State: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Kabinettsarchiv, Staatsrat, Protokoll 1769. Nr. 1315.

32 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchiv, Hausarchiv, Hofreisen Kt. 7. alter Fasc. 7. fol. 31r-v., 29r. Kubin [Kovin], 15. May 1773.

33 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Kabinettsarchiv, Staatsrat, Protokoll 1774. Nr. 20.

34 Szentkláray 1879, 224–225; and Pietsch 1996.

35 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (Budapest), Regincolaris Levéltár, Archivum palatinale, Archivum locumtenentiale Alberti ducis Saxoniae (N 13) Lad. 61. Fasc. 3. Nr. 7. Maria Theresa's order of 8. March 1778: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (Budapest), Magyar Kancelláriai Levéltár, Magyar Királyi Kancellária regisztratúrája, Libri regii (A 57) Vol. 51. p. 10. and 39.

36 Beales 2009, 340.

different legal rights. He identified these differences as the main source of unrest, jealousy and strife.³⁷ His advisers in the State Council (*Staatsrat*) opposed his proposal, and argued against it by referring precisely to the heterogeneous nature of the territory.

Joseph II's idea cannot be dismissed as simply ill-informed or naïve. Its primary source was the principle that Joseph II so passionately espoused during his co-regency and after he became Emperor: the idea of a unified state. For such a uniform and unified state, it was an anathema to have regions of special legal standing such as the Banat or the various ethnic and religious groups of Transylvania. This dislike was behind Joseph II's proposal to sell off land in the Banat and form private landholdings similar to those that existed in the other provinces of the Habsburg Monarchy. It was this consideration that prompted him to suggest the introduction of private landownership in the 'mixed' territory of the proposed Transylvania–Maramaros–Banat, although he surely did not want to replicate the situation in the Kingdom of Hungary where powerful Estates were a political force to be reckoned with. There is another example that illustrates that the Emperor was not so vehemently opposed to the Estates. He reached a similar conclusion after a visit to Galicia. In his suggestions concerning the administration of this newly acquired land, he planned to give an important role to the Estates. Maria Theresa, who spent much of her reign wrestling with the Estates, was not surprisingly against this notion.³⁸

Joseph II's knowledge of his lands came to the fore in his new system of administration set up in 1785. A new system of administrative districts was introduced in Hungary, Transylvania³⁹ as well as in Lombardy and the Austrian Netherlands.⁴⁰ The Emperor had an awareness and knowledge of the individual territories' agricultural and industrial potential together with the ethnic and religious composition their population. As a result, the freshly chosen commissar of each district was handed a detailed set of instructions with specific information on various aspects of his district from local roads to municipal leaders, from the navigability of the waterways to the economic activities of the inhabitants.⁴¹

37 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchive, Hausarchiv, Hofreisen Kt. 8. alter Fasc. 7. fol. 608v–609r. Only a few historians have mentioned this plan of the co-regent: Arneth 1879, 153.; Teutsch 1907, 159.; Schuller 1967, 309–310.

38 Rumpel 1946, 48 and Jordan 1967, 82.

39 Hajdú 1982, 172–178; Balázs 1997, 236–246.

40 Haselsteiner 1983, 38–41, Szántay 2005, 115–148, 151–202, Beales 2009, 340, 477–507.

41 Hajdu 1982, 207–220.

During his journeys, Joseph II paid close attention to the administrators and the administrative structure of the lands he toured. He was known to take notes at audiences and informal talks, including comments on the local officials' abilities, the potential capacity in which they could serve and their opinion on various subjects. These meticulously drawn character sketches that were laced with the irony so typical of the Emperor were presented to Maria Theresa: Count Lajos Kálnoky, High Sheriff of Torda County was in Joseph II's opinion "a young man who might have a good disposition but whom the Almighty has not blessed with enough talent, and he is unlikely ever to possess enough of it". Georg Schell, a high-ranking Sekler official in Segesvár was characterised as "a fat man whom I regard to be knowledgeable about the law but nothing much else".⁴² Finally, the Emperor described Count József Apor as "a bit batty, just like me; [he] has spoken so well and articulately about his position that I am convinced that he is not mad".⁴³ It is obvious from these remarks that Joseph II possessed an ability to gauge his subjects and form an opinion of them. However, in order to be able to do this, personal acquaintance was vital. For instance, on 5 July 1773 the Emperor unexpectedly turned up at a regular Monday session of the Transylvanian Chamber (*Thesaurariatus*). He was there from 10am until 1pm. During this time, he observed the session and took notes.⁴⁴ On the following day, he appeared at a session of the provincial government (*Gubernium*) where he was informed about the state of local affairs. He was also presented with a Latin summary of the issues under discussion and again made his own observations.⁴⁵ He found the administration unsatisfactory: the councillors were bogged down by too many insignificant cases. The Emperor also criticized the fact that, unlike in Vienna, the cases were not dealt with in a given way and order. He hoped that replacing the current councillors with reliable and hard-working ones together with the introduction of Viennese bureaucratic procedures would solve these problems in Transylvania.⁴⁶

Joseph II mentioned the fact that the practice of the principle of religious parity (*Proportio Geometrica*) in Transylvania made administering the province even more cumbersome. He, as always, was against any type of exemptions. Then again, if these exemptions put inept and

⁴² Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchive, Hausarchiv, Hofreisen Kt. 8. alter Fasc. 7. fol. 1039v, 1041r.

⁴³ Ibid. Hofreisen Kt. 7. alter Fasc. 7. fol. 259r. Marosvásárhely [Târgu Mureș], 11. July 1773.

⁴⁴ Ibid. fol. 224r., 230r–231r. Nagyszeben [Sibiu], 5. July 1773.

⁴⁵ Ibid. fol. 232r, 233r–235v. Nagyszeben [Sibiu], 6. July 1773.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Hofreisen Kt. 8. alter Fasc. 7. fol. 621r.

unsuitable people in high positions, his opinion was that this system “should be abolished and in the future always the worthiest should be given offices irrespective of what the accepted religions in the land were”.⁴⁷ This statement already foreshadows the Emperor’s policy during his rule as Emperor that a candidate, providing he was suitable, did not have to be a Catholic in order to qualify for an office.

Personal audiences made it possible for the Emperor to meet and quiz lower- ranking officials about their superiors and any matters of concern. Joseph II was, of course, not uncritical of the information so gathered. He preferred to rely on personal impressions collected during ad hoc meetings and official hearings. During the latter, he fired off a list of questions to the officials and expected practical, useful answers and proposals in return. Joseph II would draw up a different list of queries for different office holders: one for councillors at the Transylvanian Gubernium, another for local High Sheriffs and so on.⁴⁸ A 14-point questionnaire was specially designed by the Emperor for military officers. These varied questions covered all sorts of fields. Once back in Vienna, Joseph II would then report upon them to the State Council (Staatsrat). These reports also contained suggestions on how the administration could be reformed with special reference to financial matters.

These personal inspection tours often had an immediate effect: in 1768 in the Banat and in 1774 in Transylvania, the Emperor’s visit resulted in a considerable change of personnel. Several high-ranking officials, high sheriffs and administrators were dismissed, transferred or reassigned to a new post.⁴⁹ From that time on, the key positions in the government of Transylvania were filled by suitable locals instead of the earlier practice of appointing people from outside the province, ‘foreigners’ who were placed there from Vienna. It is clear that the new administrators were people whom Joseph II praised in his travel diaries. These were individuals whose aptitude for the positions he had personally established. These gifted administrators, some of them Protestant, acquired leading positions in 1784.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid. fol. 623v.

⁴⁸ The questionnaires: Ibid. fol. 1264r–1267r. “Puncta super quibus quilibet Tabularum Praeses, Supremus Comes, ac officialis Majestati Suae Caesareae plenam informationem, opinionemque Suam conscientiose scripto exponet”; *ibid.* fol. 1251r–1252v. “Puncta, worüber jeglicher der Herrn Thesaurariats Rätthe allerhöchst Sr. des Kaisers Maj. die vollständigen Auskünften nach seinen gewissenhaften Befund und die pflichtmässige Wohlmeynung schriftlich zu eröffnen haben wird.”

⁴⁹ The order of Maria Theresia on the personnel changes in Transylvania: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (Budapest), Erdélyi országos kormányhatósági levéltárak, Gubernium Transylvanicum Levéltára, Gubernium Transylvanicum (in politicis), Ügyiratok (F 46) 1774/6092.

⁵⁰ Order on the personnel changes of 1784: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (Budapest), Erdélyi kancelláriai levéltár, Erdélyi kancellária regisztrátúrája, Acta generalia (B 2) 1784/1311.

Religious Tolerance

It is a well-known fact that Joseph II was tolerant in terms of religion. In his private life, he was a practising Catholic who took his faith seriously but as a ruler when it came to the relationship between state and church he promoted a policy of tolerance. His travel diaries are testaments to his openness in this field: he visited churches of various denominations, and was outraged if representatives of minority religious groups were mistreated.⁵¹ When in Debrecen the Protestants complained that they dared not have a Protestant version of the Bible imported from abroad as the Jesuit censors in Pozsony [Bratislava] would impound it on religious grounds, the Emperor had the following to say: “*Bestialiter illi agunt*, because if I have an Ottoman serf, I must allow him to use the Koran, if a Jewish one then the Talmud.”⁵² He produced the first version of his idea of how to practise tolerance in 1768. This was triggered by a comment on the non-Catholics of Hungary (mostly Protestants). Joseph II argued in favour of allowing them the free practice of their beliefs, although at the time they were allowed to practise their faith only at designated (so-called ‘articulated’) places. He was against strict restrictions since he thought that restrictions on religious liberty led to more zealous behaviour, as had been shown in the case of the Catholics in the Netherlands.⁵³ He detected this very situation in Hungary, but in this case the statement applied to the Protestants.⁵⁴ Another proposal rested on impressions gathered during his journeys: wherever he visited Protestant places of worship, he found them small and dilapidated. This is why he suggested that it should be made easier for Protestants to obtain permission to repair their places of worship or to build new ones. At the time, obtaining these permissions was subject to a lengthy and tedious process in the course of which the community had to produce various applications. It is clear from the arguments Joseph II used that his concern about the Protestants

51 For example, the Armenian church: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchive, Hausarchiv, Hofreisen Kt. 7. alter Fasc. 7. fol. 99v. Ebesfalva [Dumbrăveni], 2. June 1773; in Greek Catholic churches: ibid. Kt. 2. alter Fasc. 3. fol. 315r. Munkács [Mukachevo], 3. June 1770; ibid. Kt. 7. alter Fasc. 7. fol. 126r. Brassó [Braşov], 7. June 1773.

52 Tiszáninneni református kerület levéltára, A sárospataki református kollégium tudományos gyűjteményei, Zsoldos-gyűjtemény. A./XIII./4464./102. Sámuel Nagy to György Szathmári Király, 18. May 1770. In the diary: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchive, Hausarchiv, Hofreisen Kt. 2. alter Fasc. 3. fol. 311r. Debrecen, 18. May 1770.

53 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchive, Hausarchiv, Hofreisen Kt. 2. alter Fasc. 3. fol. 263r. Joseph II’s report on religion.

54 Some examples of the complaints of the Hungarian Protestants: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchive, Hausarchiv, Hofreisen Kt. 2. alter Fasc. 3. fol. 313r. Balassagyarmat, 26. May 1770; ibid. fol. 318v. Lőcse [Levoča], 9. June 1770; ibid. fol. 319r. Lucsivna [Lučivná], 10. June 1770.

was that the restrictions under which they were forced to operate might well make them less reliable subjects. This went counter to the principles of the ruler who claimed that his erstwhile ambition was to serve his lands and do everything for the good of his subjects.⁵⁵ In 1768, the State Council (*Staatsrat*) did instruct Prince Georg Adam Starhemberg to hold a joint session with the Hungarian Chancery in order to discuss this ‘topic of extreme importance’ and draft a common opinion on the subject that could be presented to the ruler.⁵⁶ At that time, Joseph II’s proposals did not lead to any tangible changes. It would have gone against Maria Theresa’s strict Catholicism. However, they provided early evidence of the Emperor’s thinking on the issue and hinted at his future Decree of Tolerance, which regulated private and public religious practice in his realms in 1781.⁵⁷ The Edict of Toleration gave Protestants the opportunity to hold public office, which had not been allowed before. When we consider the Protestants who reached high office (for example, such as the above mentioned office of district commissars) during the reign of Joseph II, it becomes obvious that the Emperor had met many of them personally during his journeys. He established in person their suitability for state service.⁵⁸

Linguistic Uniformity

In the course of his tours, Joseph II not only came across communities that were mixed religiously but encountered many different groups speaking various languages. He knew from first-hand experience how tricky it was to find a common language with his subjects. He needed interpreters when he communicated with them.⁵⁹ This plethora of languages created particular problems in processing the numerous petitions with which the Emperor was presented during his travels. In 1773 in Transylvania, he received altogether 16,148 petitions on countless issues: military service, land disputes, peasant complaints, job applications, etc.⁶⁰ These petitions, of course, helped Joseph

⁵⁵ Ibid. fol. 263r–264v. Joseph II’s report on religion.

⁵⁶ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Kabinettsarchiv, Staatsrat, Protokoll 1768. Nr. 2064.

⁵⁷ Balázs 1997, 180–184, Beales 2009, 168–196.

⁵⁸ For example the Calvinist Farkas Bánffy was nominated as high commissioner in Transylvania: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (Budapest), Erdélyi kancelláriai levéltár, Erdélyi kancellária regisztratórája, Acta generalia (B 2) 1778/1226. and later as president of the Transylvanian Chamber: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (Budapest), Erdélyi országos kormányhatósági levéltárak, Gubernium Transylvanicum Levéltára, Gubernium Transylvanicum (in politicis), Ügyiratok (F 46) 1787/4160.

⁵⁹ For example with Vlachs: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchiv, Hausarchiv, Hofreisen Kt. 7. alter Fasc. 7. fol. 39v. Mehadia, 18. May 1773; with Polish subjects: ibid. fol. 275r. Máramarossziget [Sighetu Marmăției], 17. July 1773.

⁶⁰ Kulcsár 2001.

II form an understanding of the issues that exercised the inhabitants of his lands. Nevertheless, he needed officials who were familiar with the languages spoken at any given locality. The complications that resulted from this state of affairs might have been the source of the Emperor's desire to introduce an imperial language (*Reichssprache*, *Universalsprache*). Beforehand, the administration of the hereditary provinces was conducted in German, but in Hungary and Transylvania the official language was Latin. This caused difficulties in communication between the various authorities. It also made it hard to produce uniform minutes, tables and statements. This situation led the Emperor to decree in 1784 that German should be the official language of government in the military and civilian administration as well in the judiciary in all of his lands, including Hungary.⁶¹ This meant not only that the various Hungarian authorities had to communicate with the central offices in German but that they had to correspond with each other in German too. From 1787 on, German became the language of law courts and legal documents. This meant that only those who spoke adequate German could be employed in central Hungarian offices, as well as at county level, and in cities and towns. At middle and higher levels of education, German was to be taught instead of Latin. It is not hard to see how this decree was inspired by Joseph II's experiences in his multilingual realms. He was driven by ideas of uniformity and utility but did not count on their psychological effects: he did not anticipate the reaction of the Hungarian Estates despite the fact that he had personal as well as indirect knowledge of them. He was well-aware of these Estates' fixation on traditions, including the use of Latin in official documents, but he disregarded it in his search for a higher purpose. The language decree in Hungary was interpreted not only as the abolition of Latin in Hungary but as an attack on Hungarian as a language and as an affront to ancient Hungarian customs. The Hungarian Estates also feared that when sufficiently 'Germanized' they could be integrated into the hereditary provinces and that posts in the local Hungarian administration would be filled by 'foreigners', potentially Austrian administrators. It would be a mistake to see the language decree as one of Joseph II's pet ideas that derived exclusively from his travelling experiences. The precursor of the decree was probably a proposal by Prince Wenzel Anton Kaunitz from 1761. In his proposal, Kaunitz suggested to Maria Theresa that the inhabitants of the Austrian Netherlands should be obliged to teach their

61 Balázs 1997, 205–211; Beales 2009, 366–370.

children German, otherwise they would not be allowed to hold office. At the time, the Queen rejected this idea.⁶² Nonetheless, this principle of language learning might have been taken later to its logical conclusion by Joseph II in his language decree. In 1777, in Hungary the so called *Ratio Educationis*, based on the Austrian *Allgemeine Schulordnung* of 1774, prescribed the teaching of German at schools. Hence, the Emperor might have thought that there were enough German-speaking people available in the country. His idea of utility was interpreted completely differently by contemporary Hungarians, who took it as a frontal attack. Many construed that the decree would abolish Hungarian (and other languages) in everyday communication as well. In another rescript on the subject, Joseph II emphasized that the language decree served the greater public good, and highlighted the point that the decree was silent on the subject of the use of the inhabitants' mother tongues. As before, teaching in primary schools continued to be conducted in the children's vernacular.⁶³

In the Name of Humanitarianism

Amongst social institutions, it was prisons and workhouses that fascinated Joseph II the most.⁶⁴ In Temesvár [Timișoara] prisoners were placed in a dungeon. This, unlike many other prisons, the Emperor found dry and adequately spacious. 18th-century prisons were not designed to house large numbers of inmates for a long period of time. The travel diary entries suggest that the visitors saw more than the usual number of prisoners in Temesvár. In May 1768, Joseph II was astonished to find, for example, in the above mentioned prison 171 civilian prisoners (31 of whom were women) and 80 prisoners of war. In the prison cells of Nagyvárad [Oradea] 70, mostly Romanian, criminals were waiting to be sentenced.⁶⁵ Some of the prisoners, in the spirit of utility, were put to work. For instance, in Pétervárad [Petrovaradin] they powered the water works.⁶⁶ Larger cities put convicts into workhouses (*Domus Correctoria*). In Brassó [Brașov], the building of the new workhouse,

62 Kaunitz probably took his example from the practice of Stanisław Leszczyński, the former Polish king, who had prescribed on pain of punishment that after the issuing of his order on 16 November 1748, that every legal transaction, every contract, even the official drafts must be taken in French in his Duchy of Lorraine. (Balázs 1989, 1065.)

63 Soós 2005, 265–269.

64 On prison conditions under Joseph II: Ammerer 2012, 88–92.

65 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchiv, Hausarchiv, Hofreisen Kt. 2. alter Fasc. 3. fol. 25r. Temesvár [Timișoara], 15. May 1768; *ibid.* fol. 310v. Nagyvárad [Oradea], 17. June 1770.

66 *Ibid.* fol. 29r–v. Pétervárad [Petrovaradin], 20. May 1768.

the housing of the prisoners within it and their working conditions all met with the Emperor's approval. The majority of the convicts worked on the construction site. Joseph II praised the fact that they were "chained to the wheelbarrow and hence they are freer to move than had their ankles been in irons". During his journeys, Joseph II was confronted with the practice of torture. In Transylvania two types of it were in use: a mild form where the person was only threatened with torture and another form, which was actually carried out with classical instruments of torture. As a horrible example, Joseph II wrote in detail about the case of a Romanian man who endured the whole process of torture from finger twisting to burning his chest and stomach, while three others bore witness against him. The person who was tortured suffered horrendously but refused to admit to the crime of which he was accused. He was allegedly the leader of a group of robbers who had burnt a woman to death in the course of a robbery.⁶⁷ At the time, torture was not illegal in the Habsburg Monarchy. The influence of Beccaria's ideas on punishment can be detected on the decree that abolished torture in the Banat and Galicia on 2 January 1776. The same issue was dealt with in Hungary and its constituent parts on 6 April the same year.⁶⁸ A decree in 1769 ordered that the legal code, the *Constitutio criminalis Theresiana* (also known as *Nemesis Theresiana*) that was in force in the Austrian duchies, be adopted in Transylvania. The process of translation and modification took years, although the Transylvanians themselves were keen to have a unified system of justice that was codified in a legal code.⁶⁹ The humanitarianism of Joseph II also comes through in his concern about the well-being of his subjects. This was one of the reasons why he rejected torture. He also preferred workhouses over overcrowded prisons.⁷⁰ He was against the death penalty, and favoured useful work and productivity instead. Convicts worked on public projects such as the draining of marshes, building fortresses or were involved in *Schiffziehen*, the hard labour of pulling barges upriver. The latest research draws attention to the fact that in the course of the 1780s due to the inhuman conditions of prisons and of the notorious *Schiffziehen* more people actually died than the number of those executed in the course of the previous few decades.⁷¹

67 Ibid. Kt. 7. alter Fasc. 7. fol. 123v, 126r. Brassó [Braşov], 7. June 1773.

68 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (Budapest), Erdélyi országos kormányhatósági levéltárak, Gubernium Transylvanicum Levéltára, Gubernium Transylvanicum (in politicis), Ügyiratok (F 46) 1769/2520. See also Balázs 1989/b, 1030–1031 and Hajdu 1983, 332–333, 396.

69 In 1774, the translation was still unfinished: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Kabinettsarchiv, Staatsrat, Protokoll 1774. Nr. 760.

70 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchive, Hausarchiv, Hofreisen Kt. 2. alter Fasc. 3. fol. 310v. Nagyvárad [Oradea], 17. May 1770. On the workhouse in Gyulafehérvár [Alba Iulia], see ibid. Kt. 7. alte Fasc. 7. fol. 67r. Gyulafehérvár [Alba Iulia], 25. May 1773.

71 Ammerer 2012, 333–396.

Conclusion

Joseph II's travels and the relevant sources illustrate how the Emperor tried to transcend the ethnic and religious divisions of his lands and sought to promote the greater public good and what he called the 'happiness' of his subjects. His experiences and his reactions to them were all voiced passionately, ironically, bitterly or even sometimes with humour in his travel diaries. All his projects promoted the enrichment, education and improved health of his subjects. His proposals were drafted in this spirit. This aim, however, often jarred with reality. It is a fact but Joseph II's desire to do good remains unquestionable. His methods and individual policies naturally underwent considerable changes in the course of the 15 years of his co-regency and later during his sole rule. A strong common thread throughout his diaries and something that remained unchanged from the time of his early travels to his premature death, however, was his complete dedication, verging on mania, to his own vision of a meritocratic, unified state, which he strove to create, and his micromanagement of the process of creating it out of his disparate lands. No doubt, it was a key contributing factor to the failure of the Emperor's mission.

Perhaps, given Joseph II's controlling nature, it is appropriate to end this chapter with his own, somewhat fatalistic words. As he wrote to Franz Moritz Lacy, the president of the Imperial War Council in 1773:

During my tours, I observe, strive to inform myself and take notes [...]. I might benefit from this immediately but surely it will prove useful in the future. Then it might not. Everything depends on Providence but I will never regret having spent the trouble and many nice years on improving and instructing myself, and on collecting information that might be useful in the uncertain future.⁷²

Translated by Orsolya Szakály

⁷² Joseph II. to Lacy, Kolozsvár [Cluj], 26. June 1773. Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Habsburg-Lothringische Hausarchive, Hausarchiv, Sammelbände Kt. 72. Konv. 2. fol. 12r.

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